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U.S. Had Advised Sadat Since '74

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 7 — United States concern about the personal safety of President Anwar el-Sadat goes back to the Nixon Administration.

According to American officials, past and present, Mr. Sadat asked President Richard M. Nixon for help and was provided with advice from the Secret Service on procedures for protecting leaders and with communications equipment from the Central Intelligence Agency

that would enable him to keep his whereabouts secret.

The assistance was part of an American policy of helping friendly leaders in the Middle East protect themselves against potential attacks by Libyans, Palestinian guerrillas, Moslem fundamentalists or their own armed forces.

For over two decades in the Middle East, it has been difficult to separate the exigencies of personal safety from the requirements of diplomacy. For Arab leaders to deal with the United States and Israel was to court personal danger.

On at least one occasion, the United States was prepared to move beyond passive assistance and to go to the source of the threats, according to Reagan Administration officials.

In 1980, according to the officials, President Jimmy Carter made plans with Mr. Sadat, the Saudi leaders, and Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, then President of France, for covert action against Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi, the Libyan leader. When Mr. Giscard d'Estaing lost his bid for re-election last spring, the plan, which would have used Egyptian and Sudanese paramilitary forces, was shelved, according to officials.

Mr. Carter said today that he had dissuaded Mr. Sadat at one time from invading Libya. When asked about that, former Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger said the Nixon and Ford Administrations would have approved the attack, but the question apparently never arose.

On another occasion, in 1977, it took direct threats by President Carter to induce Colonel Qaddafi to recall two killers he had dispatched to assassinate Hermann F. Eilts, the American Ambassador to Egypt from 1973 to 1979.

Mr. Eilts said in an interview today that he and his family returned to the United States after American intelligence had heard about the plan and that President Carter had sent sharp messages to the Libyan leader. The messages detailed American knowledge of the Libyan operation, Mr. Eilts said.

In the meantime, according to Mr. Eilts and other officials, one of the assassins was apprehended and the other never arrived in Egypt.

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curity were also concerned about a potential threat from within Egypt.

"Mr. Sadat himself had a terribly fatalistic view about security," Mr. Eilts said. "He was cavalier about it, but some of his people, his personal bodyguards and security people, wanted help."

It was provided beginning in 1974 in contacts between the Secret Service and Mr. Sadat's bodyguards. The Americans explained their techniques for moving Presidents around and guarding exit and entry points and their emergency evacuation procedures.

It could not be learned whether their advice included the use of a bulletproof shield on public occasions like a parade. It is standard procedure for an American President to be shielded in this manner on Inauguration Day.

In 1977, the officials said, Mr. Sadat's bodyguards requested advanced communications gear that had been developed by the Central Intelligence Agency. The equipment would allow them to send messages without danger of interception. The concern, officials said, was with potential plotters against Mr. Sadat in the armed forces.

"Having been a plotter in the armed forces himself," Mr. Eilts said, "Mr. Sadat was alert to this possible problem."

Sadat Kept Checking on the Army

According to Administration officials, Mr. Sadat had his own techniques for keeping checks on the military services, and he received daily reports through this system. However, the officials said, Mr. Sadat never asked for American help for eavesdropping on his own armed forces.

A senior intelligence official said today that information available about Mr. Sadat's assassins indicated that they were Moslem fundamentalists. He said the Egyptian authorities, apparently concerned about a possible plot, arrested 20 people two weeks ago, including military officers.

Those arrests, and the interrogations that followed, prompted the authorities to widen their investigation and early last week, 50 more people were arrested. The official said he did not know how many, if any, were military officers.